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ABSTRACT

This report emphasizes the interrelationship of culture and language. The school situation in Toronto is examined with a view toward improving the learning environment of the immigrant. Traditional attempts at student assessment are seen as inadequate, and obstacles precluding successful student assimilation are underscored. Suggestions for curricular and program reform include a reassessment of educational priorities. (RL)

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IMMIGRANTS AND THEIR EDUCATION

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THE BOARD OF EDUCATION FOR THE CITY OF TORONTO

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# IMMIGRANTS AND THEIR EDUCATION

## INTRODUCTION

There has been more and more discussion of "the New Canadian problem." Students who come from other cultures are faced with a different set of values and mores and often a new language. To refer to them as a problem is to do them an injustice. To recognize the numerous diverse problems that they face especially in the schools is essential. To assist these students to solve their problems, gain an education, and understand (though not necessarily believe) Canadian values and mores, all in the English language is a complex task.

From information included in the current Study of Achievement, it can be reported that approximately 50% of the parents of students entering the Toronto school system were born outside of Canada. In examining the reports issued by the Department of Immigration, support is given to the ever-increasing problem of the education of New Canadians. This Department states that 25% of all immigrants entering Canada, settle in Metropolitan Toronto. In a ten and one-half month period from July 1964 to May 1965, 1926 students entered Toronto schools from non-English speaking countries. It is evident from these figures alone that the particular education of these children needs careful and serious consideration.

It is most difficult to indicate the interrelatedness of the issues. Language especially tends to be thought of apart from culture when it is instead a most significant part of culture. English is considered essential as a tool to enable these students to communicate. To learn the meanings and concepts of English words is to understand parts of Canadian culture, a culture different from the student's.

## CULTURE

Examples from Toronto classrooms and students will help illustrate the relatedness of culture and language. In one primary class, in a lesson related to pets, the teacher found that pets were outside the frame of reference of some students, though they could say the word. A pet implied wastefulness in supporting an animal that would not provide food, shelter or protection. Words are meaningless without an accompanying concept (Brown and Lenneberg, 1959). This concept of pet was strange to some students who came from poverty yet it is a common concept in the schools. One boy, on arrival in Toronto, thought he had arrived on fiesta--a feast day--because the wires (telephone and hydro) were strung across the road. Another student had trouble with the sentence "He had to dress in a hurry." Though the words could be read, it was puzzling to think of a boy (he) in girl's clothes (dress). Concepts, ideas, values, are all part of a culture (Carroll, 1964). To have the knowledge and understanding that means grasping a concept does not equal and certainly does not require acceptance of the idea.

To understand and meet the needs of the people from many lands requires an understanding of their traditions, beliefs, values, attitudes and expectations. The pupil lives in a home that may differ from the homes of most teachers. The pupils face many conflicts because of these differences. Social workers have provided virtually the only bridge between the Board and the children and can document, with many case histories, the nature and extent of these conflicts.

The Research Department undertook an examination of non-verbal ability tests, to determine the usefulness of any available tests for

use with non-English speaking students. Two tests were chosen for administration and were given to students, ages 10 to 17 years, who had arrived in Canada within the last year and one-half. These students were then interviewed individually by Research Department personnel to try to obtain information concerning the problems they faced. Only about 30% of the students tested could speak and understand English well enough to answer simple questions about themselves, their families and their activities. From the 37 students interviewed, several facts and patterns emerge.

The interviews were analyzed in an attempt to crudely outline those elements which created problems. Even with a limited number of cases, different patterns began to emerge that seemed to be more related to the level of assimilation into Canadian life than to country of origin. Some of the factors that seemed related to assimilation included:

a) parents who spoke some English in the home;

b) the presence of books, magazines and newspapers in the home (both English and other languages);

c) the extent to which friends were chosen from other cultures.

In addition, it is important to note that familiarization with cities before coming to Toronto seemed to diminish some of the problems of assimilation.

It is an error to think that all these students wanted to come to Canada. Even their families did not always have a great deal of choice in the particular country to which they could immigrate. Some of the factors affecting their decision to emigrate and their choice of country might have been the economic pressures of the home land and the publicity given to Canada, both publicly and by relatives already here.

Another fallacy is that things in Canada are better or more pleasant than in their native lands. Students, newly arrived in our schools, sometimes have different ideas as to what is better or more pleasant.

One boy missed the nearby sea and the opportunity to fish. Another boy rode a horse six miles to school each day, slapped it on the rump and sent it home when he got to school. When school was out "his" horse was there waiting to take him back. This same boy found the city streets noisy, confusing and without interest. Certainly many Toronto children would envy these boys their experiences. It must not be forgotten that these new arrivals in our city have had a great deal that our Toronto-born pupils will never have. The knowledge, experiences and traditions brought from other lands and from our own country can be used in the classroom. To develop programmes and approaches that will help the students understand, appreciate and learn about each other and themselves cannot be completed overnight, but it must remain as a long range goal.

## ASSESSMENT

Attempting to assess ability is a most risky proposition. New York City has abandoned the use of group intelligence tests. This decision was determined in part by the recent influx of Puerto Ricans and others into the city. "The official announcement explained that a group I.Q. test score can present a misleading picture of a student's learning potential that may result in inappropriate classification and instruction." (Phi Delta Kappan, 1964, p. 105, see also A. Hughson, 1964 and J. Yourman, 1964.) Lennon (1965) reminds us that all intelligence tests assume, "(1) that all examinees have had substantially equal opportunity to learn the kinds of the things covered by the test, and (2) that all examinees are equally motivated to do their best on the test." Neither assumption is valid for people from other cultures. In spite of this, group tests of intelligence have been given to relatively recent arrivals in this country and the addition of the comment "(language problem)" does not add one iota of value to the score which of necessity must remain meaningless.

Pilot studies conducted in Toronto this year have helped to emphasize the misleading character of test results. In one non-verbal test used, it was observed that certain items tended to be "incorrectly" answered by certain cultural groups. "Incorrectly" is placed in quotes because the subjects in some cases chose the same "wrong" answer. In other words, depending on cultural background, there may be different and equally valid answers. Anastasi (1965) has said "Cultures and sub-cultures frequently differ in the emphasis they place on speed--also, the motivation to hurry, and the value attached to rapid performance

vary widely." In using another non-verbal test, it was observed that several subjects, after some successful concentrated effort "gave up" and randomly, rapidly, pointed to different answers, apparently so that they could remove themselves from the "test situation." A reaction very similar to this was discovered when testing Puerto Rican children in New York City (A. Anastasi and F. A. Cordova, 1953).

If ability testing is unsuitable for people of other cultures, what about achievement testing? While on the surface it does seem reasonable, it must be remebered that students are NOT tested to find out what or how much they know (Torrance, 1965). Rather achievement tests are samples of the content from the schools' courses of study (Caplan and Ruble, 1964). These tests sample our courses of study, not theirs. Tests of achievement will, in many cases, tell us what we already know--that the immigrants have followed different courses of study than our children. In addition it must be remembered that test scores can be affected positively by both practice and test sophistication.

## LANGUAGE

Language is a manifestation of culture and exact translations from language to language are not possible. The objects and ideas that a teacher associates with such a word as "home" may be very different from the ideas of a person coming from another culture. Reading and using a word correctly in a sentence does not mean that the individual is using the same concepts that the teacher is using (Lado, 1961).

With this in mind, it must be pointed out that language competence is difficult to assess. The potential student in our school system has many different areas in which he must develop English. There are "basic concepts" related to food, shelter, etc. There are "city concepts": the student must learn both the language and sometimes the concepts that go with transportation, safety, communication, commerce, etc. in a large urban area. Also there are "school concepts": ideas from "dividend" to "peninsula," from "noun" to "class dismissed," from "go to the board" to "explorer" are part of the subject content and behaviour in school.

Much of the work that has been done in the teaching of languages has been based on the principle of single language transfer (Fries, 1945). Single language transfer assumes all students have a common language and from this they are going to move to learning a single second language. The instruction is determined by the nature of the student's original language and the new language. On this basis, teaching through contrasts and similarities has proven effective for the various aspects of language, including pronunciation, structure and concepts (Lado, 1957 and Weinreich, 1953). Many American programmes have been based on this

principle as the influx of Puerto Ricans in one part of the States and of Mexicans in the South West have created a predominantly single language and culture problem. The multi-ethnic population in Toronto schools creates different problems from the problems encountered in working with single ethnic groups. American programmes cannot be adapted without considerable modifications and only a little work has been done in relation to multi-ethnic populations.

Toronto has been referred to above as having a multi-ethnic population. Data from the ongoing Study of Achievement indicates this diversity and its extent. (This data is based on all Senior Kindergarten pupils, 1961-1962.) For these students 37 different countries are represented in "Father's Country of Birth"; following Canada, Italy is the most common and the British Isles ranks as the next most common. Of the students, 40% come from a home where another language is spoken in addition to or instead of English.

Out of 8592 homes:

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| Italian was spoken in | 1225 (14.3%) homes |
| German was spoken in | 443 ( 5.2%) homes |
| Ukrainian was spoken in | 282 ( 3.3%) homes |
| Polish was spoken in | 239 ( 2.8%) homes |
| Greek was spoken in | 187 ( 2.2%) homes |
| French was spoken in | 135 ( 1.6%) homes |
| Chinese was spoken in | 106 ( 1.2%) homes |
| Portuguese was spoken in | 101 ( 1.2%) homes |
| Yugoslav was spoken in | 76 ( 0.9%) homes |
| Lithuanian was spoken in | 71 ( 0.8%) homes |
| Other languages spoken in | 566 ( 6.6%) homes |

Twenty-eight per cent of the pupils from these homes were reported as being able to speak English and another language while 6.7% (572 pupils) could speak no English when they entered school. Some of these pupils were born in Canada.

Not all non-English speaking students entering our schools system in Kindergarten readily learn English. A teacher recorded the following comment about a student after he had spent four years in our school beginning in Kindergarten "...does not speak English in the home. During school hours he struggles to express himself but in such poor English that his ideas are not made clear and he is sensitive and embarrassed by our lack of understanding."

Another way of describing the extent of language difficulty is to state that there were 4843 students in our schools who were reported to be "limited in their ability to use English." It should be noted that this figure is more than twice the number of arrivals from non-English speaking countries in the preceeding ten and one-half months. It must be reiterated, that discussing language separately in this manner means ignoring many interrelated problems. Nearly all questions and concerns expressed within the school system have centered exclusively on language, excepting those raised by the social workers.

## PRESENT PROVISIONS IN TORONTO SCHOOLS

To provide some current statistics, in May 1965, a simple survey was conducted of all Toronto schools. From the numbers it is possible to partially indicate current status of the schools' New Canadian population.

Over two-thirds of the schools have no special classes for New Canadians. In some schools without special classes it has been observed that the teachers try very hard to set aside class time to work with those who cannot speak English.

The number of students provided for by any kind of special class is less than half the total of non-English immigrants in the last ten and one-half months. A full-time programme of English is provided for only 73 pupils. Such a programme is provided for 194 "adults," many of whom are in their late teens, potential secondary students. A few potential secondary school students with no knowledge of English are not admitted into a secondary or elementary school in the Toronto system but are enrolled in the programme at COSTI sponsored by the International Institute.

The 836 students who attend some form of special class, though not on a full-time basis, are withdrawn from their regular classes to receive instruction. That is to say, the students take a period or two of English during the day or during the week and then go back to "sink or swim" in their regular class. For most of the students, this is not much English. Two, two and one-half, one and one-half, or even one-half an hour per week (though in a few rare cases as much as five or eight and three-quarter hours per week) is spent in these special classes.

Even this limited time is not always consistently available: for example one school reported, in reference to these classes, "This has been done by the vice-principals and they are sometimes called for duties."

Nine schools reported programmes that had been discontinued, "...because teachers had to be used in the Art Room," or "...when a Special Assignment teacher was not available," or "...because of lack of staff to do this withdrawal work," or "teacher no longer available." The Special Assignment teachers, used when they are available in the Fall, are generally inexperienced teachers with no teaching experience and little or no knowledge of linguistics or of teaching English as a second language.

A high percentage of students with a limited knowledge of English are found in the primary grades. As one principal reported, "Our Kindergartens admit many children with no English even though the family may have lived here several years." These students are in addition to the immigrants.

At this time of year, the high schools have less than one-half the proportion of students with limited ability to speak English than grades 7 and 8 in the public schools. Virtually none of the new arrivals go to high school. Proportionately the elementary schools received five times as many immigrants as the high schools. It appears that there is presently little room or provision in our secondary schools for students until they can speak English.

The data, school by school, makes it possible to identify the extensive, reception areas for new arrivals. Further work would have to be done to trace the patterns of mobility though a preliminary rough description was prepared by the City of Toronto Planning Board in 1960.

## DISCUSSION

At present we see cultures in conflict. Social workers who know the home and school cite individual case histories. As yet we lack information concerning all the problems that may emerge when there is a multi-ethnic population. It has reached the point where there are Greeks learning Italian so that they can get along in Toronto. Our school system and most of the schools have tended to maintain themselves in a "splendid isolation" waiting for the children from other lands to adjust to our city, our ways and our classrooms. The immigrants have in many cases retreated to the solace and support of ethnic communities and organizations. Only the tremendous variety of immigrants, their mobility, and the continuing influx have prevented sharply defined ghettos from developing.

Integration is a two-way street. The phrase sounds like an appropriate response but what does it mean? It means that the cultures of the new arrivals are valuable. Canadians cannot expect all new arrivals to "learn our way." That kind of demand generates and maintains strong ethnic groups who isolate themselves in an attempt to preserve valuable elements of their heritage. The schools must draw on the resources and experience of all students from all countries. Currently the schools have the opportunity to do so.

Integration means one other thing. It means that we must be alert to prejudice. As long as the phrase "those foreigners" can be heard, there is prejudice. While prejudice cannot be removed easily, it is possible to select understanding teachers and counsellors who can establish communication with these pupils from insight into the children's historical and cultural backgrounds.

Some of the current confusions, the scarcity of information, and the continuing nature of the problems have been indicated. It is critical to recognize both the short and long term aspects. Typically the school responds to situations when they become pressing. In this instance, at least, there is a need not only to respond to immediate pressures but to formulate long range goals. Possibly Boston could be used as one model. In that city present programmes reflect fifteen years of studying the sociology of the various ethnic groups being served by the schools. Toronto might then mount studies of their own population realizing that there would be no immediate fruits. At the same time, programmes instituted in the next few years should be flexible so that they could alter as information becomes available.

Chicago is a city that provides a different model. Through a liaison between university and school board, it has been possible to draw on the current studies in linguistics. With the assistance of the professors, programmes are being developed that reflect current knowledge and scholarship. A second reason to examine the city of Chicago as a model is that they too face a multi-ethnic community, and find that much of the material prepared to date is not suitable for their use.

With reference to short-term goals, several immediate areas of response can be identified. When a stranger in a strange land comes to school, informational material in his parents' native language would assist both school and parents in the details of registration. Whatever the procedure of instruction on entry, someone should help the child "get settled," hopefully with warmth and understanding.

At the other end of the continuum, students who have learned to speak English fluently may still have problems. These often are stated in terms of clashes between their parents and what the student

sees as "the Canadian way." Currently the Board's social workers receive some of the more extreme problems. Guidance has not always encompassed the unique problems that many of these students face. Some extension of these services would provide a reference point for the students after they become an integral part of the school.

## SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

The interrelationship of culture and language has been emphasized in this report. This interrelationship leads to problems in assessment of the students and problems in the students' adjustment to the school. Initial assessment of students is complicated not only by the language barrier, but also by the students' widely differing experiential and educational backgrounds. The concept of "achievement" well illustrates the problems raised by this interrelationship. The students' adjustment to the school is often hampered by this interrelationship. Many students face problems because the school simultaneously presents new standards of behaviour and a new language. Within such a context our present attempts at initial assessment and assimilation of students into the school are fruitless and misleading.

Many implications can be drawn from the preliminary studies that have been undertaken within the Board, from the literature and from a thoughtful consideration of current knowledge:

(a) There is an immediate need to improve our knowledge and understanding of our students and the communities or sub-cultures, in which they live.

(b) Descriptive studies are required that will not only tabulate the more obvious surface characteristics but also explore in depth the nature of community mores, beliefs and values. Such studies would require time and experienced personnel.

(c) A philosophy must be shaped to provide an education for a multi-culture student population. No single textbook, method or set of procedures will meet the variety of needs the students of different

ages will bring from different lands with different educational systems. It is possible, however, to shape a philosophy, to make an approach. To learn English as a second language the student needs to initially be in a setting with an oral-aural emphasis. This setting must create an urgency within the student to learn English (and placing a child immediately in the regular classroom does not always accomplish this urgency!).

(d) Students should not be expected to compete with English speaking students (e.g. I.Q. tests, assignments, etc.) until both their social and language competencies are sufficient; this may easily take 12-18 months.

(e) Genuine involvement of the ethnic communities in education seems mandatory.

(f) Many schools might become, in effect, cultural and recreational centres for both adults and children in the immediate area.

(g) There is an obvious need, on a long-term basis, for personnel with specific responsibilities. These responsibilities will be for activities relative to those from other cultures. (Note well that no artificial limits of time, language or immigration are suggested.)

(h) On a short-term basis, there seems to be a distinct place for outside experts to be employed as consultants on specific projects. Their contributions would be determined in large measure by the specific tasks that had been given priorities and that needed immediate expert action or guidance.

Immigrants are invited and encouraged by our government. They will continue to come. The school system must improve its response to the problems of them and their children.

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